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AGE-RELATED EXPECTATIONS CONCERNING THE EFFECT OF PRESENCE OF CHILDREN ON THE SUBJECTIVE STRUCTURE OF LIFE SATISFACTION

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Abstract

Age group analysis of the subjective structure of life satisfaction is put into the framework of Mannheim's discussion of "the problem of the generations". Analyses of the historical and contemporary social contexts are called upon to derive age-related expectations concerning the influence of presence of children on the subjective structure of life satisfaction. Using a sample of 736 adults in Edmonton and Winnipeg, the expectations are confirmed. Multiple regression analysis indicates that when children are present, family life satisfaction assumes priority in the prediction of overall life satisfaction across age groups affected. No significant differences in mean overall life satisfaction by age and presence of children are indicated in an analysis of variance. Theoretical and methodological implications are discussed.

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The present research is concerned with overall life satisfaction as a dependent variable, and with domain satisfactions as contributors to overall life satisfaction as these contributions differ by age of respondent and presence of children. The domains used are non-working activities; family life; health and physical condition; amount of time; friendships; and standard of living. Our theoretical model is similar to that employed by Campbell et al. (1976:15-16) in which overall life satisfaction is seen to be a product of domain satisfactions. We refer to this as the subjective structure of life satisfaction. A similar model, although elaborated to include criteria for the evaluations of domains, is presented by Andrews and Withey (1976:12-14). Their conceptual model is "intended to imply that global evaluations - i.e., how a person feels about life as a whole - may be the result of combining the domain evaluations or the criterion evaluations" in the manner that they outline (p. 14).

We shall also examine differences in overall life satisfaction by age and presence of children. We shall suggest that while much research energy has been expended on examining age differences in overall life satisfaction and the contribution of age to life satisfaction, what is also of vital research interest are differences in the subjective structure of life satisfaction by age in combination with other variables. Finally, we suggest that the addition of structural variables to age group, when examined in relationship to historical and contemporary social conditions,

enables us to derive expectations regarding period and cohort effects on attitudinal dependent variables.

Theoretical Perspective

Andrews and McKennell (1980:127) have identified the study of subjective well-being as essentially a study of attitudes. We agree with this general conclusion. However, we wish to cast the problem into a larger theoretical frame used by Mannheim in his discussion of the "problem of the generations" (Mannheim, 1952). Although Mannheim's discussion centers on the broad concepts of entelechy (generation style) and Zeitgeist (mentality of a period), which cannot be addressed by the limited data at our disposal, the way in which he poses the "problem of the generations" is instructive when dealing with age group analysis of attitudinal data.[1]

In his essay, Mannheim examines the phenomenon of generations as a "social location" based on aging and the life span. The biological fact of birth during a particular time period (cohort location) determines a "common location in the historical dimension of the social process" (Mannheim, 1952:290). It is the tendencies of thought, feeling, and behaviour associated with generation location, as well as the circumscribing of thought, feeling and behaviour because of generation location, that Mannheim relates to sets of social factors experienced historically. Although not the main focus of his discussion, Mannheim (1952:282) notes another important aspect of generational analysis in commenting on Dilthey's approach to the generational phenomenon. Here the contemporaneity of the generations is seen to be as important as their succession.

> ... their [the generations'] co-existence is of more than mere chronological significance. The same dominant influences deriving from the prevailing intellectual, social, and political circumstances are experienced by contemporary individuals, both in their early, formative, and in their late years. They are contemporaries, they constitute one generation, just because they are subject to common influences.

Thus, we may view the generations present in any sociocultural setting as being influenced by common contemporary social circumstances, as well as by differential social circumstances historically experienced.[2] Moreover, within the contemporary setting, social factors may have an inherently differential impact on various age groups. Within historical settings, this may be (and almost surely is) accurate as well.

At least two empirical propositions regarding the subjective structure of life satisfaction by age group can be derived from Mannheim's discussion: (1) Age groups in a given context may be expected to vary because they have been subjected to varying historical experiences (the cohort is the relevant unit of analysis with the emphasis on date of entry into a social system); and (2) age groups may be expected to be similar because they are contemporaries in a given sociocultural context and influenced to a great extent by the same social factors. To form a more complete set of propositions, we must add a third and fourth; (3) age groups may be expected to vary because they may be differentially affected by the sociocultural context due to its inherent differential impact on various age groups; and (4) age groups may be expected to be similar because they have been subjected to similar historical experiences.

We may safely assume that the sociocultural context, either historical or contemporary, is not unidimensional in impact. We are interested in a particular dimension of social life, household structure, and in a particular aspect of that dimension, presence of children. Following Mannheim's approach, we must find some indications from both the historical and contemporary record of the "dominant influences deriving from the prevailing intellectual, social, and political circumstances" which bear upon the structural variable, presence of children, that we are using in combination with age. We must look outside our data to the historical and contemporary conditions affecting the meaning of children in families to derive expectations concerning the impact of age of respondent and presence of children on the subjective structure of life satisfaction.

In his social history of Western family life, Aries (1962) documents changes in the ideas of childhood and the family. He notes particularly the changes occurring between the Middle Ages and the seventeenth century, at which point we may definitively recognize certain aspects of the modern family in its relationship to children, among the nobility and the middle class. Of this relationship, Aries (1962:412-413) states:

> The family ceased to be simply an institution for the transmission of a name and an estate - it assumed a moral and spiritual function, it moulded bodies and souls. The care expended on children inspired new feelings, a new emotional attitude, to which the iconography of the seventeenth century gave brilliant and insistent expression: the modern concept of the family.

At about the eighteenth century, the evolution of childhood and its centrality in the meaning of family life was extending to other social strata. Aries (1962:404) notes that today,

> All the energy of the group [parents and children] is expended on helping the children to rise in the world, individually and without any collective ambition.

In his recent analysis of modern Western childhood, Postman (1982) suggests that childhood in its most developed sense is about 150 years old. Childhood as a definitive stage for which adults in the family are normatively obliged to take responsibility may just now be beginning to erode, according to Postman.[3] Synnott (1983:87) cites the "new loss of childhood" in the eighties. Lee (1982) refers to the view of childhood emerging from social conditions fostered by the industrial revolution as the "protection paradigm". Parents are viewed as having duties of protection and provision for the support of their children. Lee further suggests the contemporary emergence of a new paradigm of childhood, the "personal paradigm" of rights based on behavioural competency. However, this paradigm is far from being widely distributed in society at present.

Nett (1981) notes the relative dearth of historical material on the Canadian family. Her review of the literature on children in Canadian families suggests that their experience has not changed drastically in the twentieth century. Sutherland (1976) documents changes occurring in the fields of health, welfare and education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Canada which focussed on the welfare of children. He concludes: "Most children born in 1921 found the world treated them more tenderly than it had their predecessors (Sutherland, 1976:241). While

many children experienced the harsher conditions and attitudes associated with pre-reform times,

> of those born over the next three decades, however, a growing proportion lived through childhoods very different from those of the generations that preceded them. What by the 1920's many English Canadians had made into their policy, and which they exemplified through lives of some of their children, gradually became the norm for bringing up all Canadian youngsters (Sutherland, 1976:241).

The results of societal attention and reforms resulted in a "transformed childhood" and represents the "twentieth century consensus" on children in English Canada.

The historical materials cited suggest that the cohorts represented in our data, while being influenced by their own unique configurations of historical experience, nevertheless have been and still are largely being influenced by societal conditions promoting a "consensus" on children and appropriate attitudes toward children in families[4] (see proposition 4 above). The literature suggests that this attitude is by and large one of responsibility for guiding children through a definitive "stage" and assuming this responsibility with an appropriate positive emotional stance.[5] The expectations that we may derive concerning the subjective structure of life satisfaction are the following:

Among domains of life contributing to overall life satisfaction, we can expect family life satisfaction to be predominant when children are present; and we can expect this to be so across all living generations. In the case of the impact of children on the structuring of life satisfaction,

both the contemporary and recent historical sociocultural contexts would lead us to hypothesize the same effect. Unfortunately, from a methodological point of view, we are no further ahead in ferreting out period and cohort effects, although it is conceivable that in other combinations of age and strutural variables or with other dependent variables, differences in effect would be predicted.

Empirical Studies

The relationship of domains of subjective well-being to global states has been explored in recent studies of subjective well-being (Campbell, et al., 1976; Andrews and Withey, 1976). Herzog, et al, (1982) reanalyzing data from surveys conducted by Campbell, et al. (1976), Andrews and Withey (1976), and a number of other major U.S. social indicators surveys,[6] found only small differences by age level. For example, economic satisfaction had an important and similar impact upon overall life satisfaction for all age levels in almost all of the data sets examined. Some differences between younger and older age groups were found in the impact of marriage and work satisfactions (more salient for the young) and interpersonal/leisure satisfactions (more salient for the old) (Herzog, et al., 1982:63-67). Medley (1980) reanalyzing the Campbell, Converse and Rodgers data, used three subjective domain measures and one objective variable to predict life satisfaction by sex and age group. Family life satisfaction was found to be an important contributor to overall life satisfaction for both sexes at each age level.

In regard to age and overall life satisfaction, the findings are inconsistent. Most studies indicate that overall satisfaction either increases or is not affected by age. Campbell, et al. (1976:36) report that satisfaction was higher among older people, but happiness lower.

Andrews and Withey (1976:330) report that happiness was lower for older persons, but there was no trend for satisfaction. They note that studies which compare general levels of well-being across age and life cycle groups have shown little substantive difference (Andrews and Withey, 1976:286). Fernandez and Kulik (1981:846), analyzing national survey data in the U.S., found that older persons were more satisfied than younger. In fact, their second-best predictor of satisfaction was age.[7] Medley (1980:193) found a fairly high level of life satisfaction across stages of adult life and an increasing level of overall life satisfaction by age for men. In their cross-national research, Davis, et al. (1982:351) found age to be significantly related to life satisfaction in five of the eight nations studied. Generally, age was negatively associated with life satisfaction; however, inconsistencies and non-linearity were noted.

A number of studies have examined factors affecting life satisfaction among the elderly (see for example Toseland and Rasch, 1979; Spreitzer and Snyder, 1974; and Bell, 1976). Life satisfaction has been viewed as a measure of psychological health in retirement (Streib and Schneider, 1971); and in conjunction with other measures as optimism in retirement (Back and Guptil, 1966); and as morale (Kerckhoff, 1966); and as adjustment (Conner and Powers, 1975; Dressler, 1973; and Sherwood, et.al., 1974). It has been used prominently in testing activity theory and disengagement theory among the elderly (Lemon, et al., 1976; Maddox, 1965; Tobin and Neugarten, 1961; Havighurst, Neugarten and Tobin, 1968). While a great deal of effort has been expended on examining subjective well-being and the determinents of subjective well-being among the elderly and among the population as a whole (see the extensive studies done by Bradburn, 1969; Campbell, et al., 1976;

and Andrews and Withey, 1976), there have been recent calls for more life span and age group analysis of subjective well-being.

> Thus, not enough effort has been put into systematically examining the change and development of subjective well-being across the life span (Herzog, et al., 1982:1).
>
> and
>
> ... there is less than adequate literature comparing life experiences between the various stages of adulthood (Medley, 1980:194).

Methodological Problems

When age groups are compared, however, we are confronted by the problems of interpretation noted earlier. Herzog, et al., (1982) use cross-sectional data to examine age differences in subjective well-being indicating, however, that longitudinal data would better serve an examination of the process of aging and its relationship to subjective well-being. Medley (1980:207) uses cross-sectional data to test developmental theories, indicating that the "total confounding effect of being born in different historical eras can not be completely explained in the absence of comprehensive longitudinal studies based on probability samples." The developmental perspective assumes a kind of inherent sequence of life stages, some of which are associated with growth and maturation and some of which may be associated with decline and even disengagement (Maas and Kuypers, 1975:1-2). Both inherent maturational tendencies and the taking on and discarding of social roles are involved in the concept.[8]

One cannot dispute the relevance and need for longitudinal data bases, particularly for testing developmental theories where it is important to separate out the effects of aging as a biological and psychological phenomenon from the effects of cohort membership with its dimension of differential historical experience. Rodgers (1982:774) states, "It is well known that analyses of cross-sectional data inevitably confound the effects of age with those of cohort" and Elder, Jr., (1975:170) notes:

> Some challenging problems of interpretation and method stem from the fact that age locates individuals in the social structure and in a specific cohort; thus age differences in cross-sectional data may be due to life stage, cohort historical factors, or both.

Confounding influences of one source of variation upon another also make interpretation difficult. Nydegger (1976), for example, raises the issue of source of "development" or developmental change and suggests from her review of four studies that external demands and expectations may bring out latent personality characteristics. This view suggests to us that the sociocultural forces impacting on individuals may structure what we observe about their subjective states. Thus, age-related variation in subjective states (in this instance, overall life satisfaction and satisfaction in various life domains) may not be fully or ultimately accounted for by an inherent tendency toward "growth" or "maturity", but by responses to given social and economic realities in a particular historical circumstance. Certainly, Mannheim's perspective would lead us to focus our analysis on these latter variables.

The methodological advantage of introducing a social structural variable (presence of children) into our age group analysis of life satisfaction is that it guides us to tap specific dimensions of the historical record on social conditions and specific dimensions of contemporary social conditions as well. Thus we may formulate hypotheses regarding period and cohort effects on attitudinal variables that are reflective of societal change or stability in specific aspects of social life. When similarity of effect is hypothesized, as in the present instance, we cannot distinguish period and cohort effects. When difference of effect is hypothesized, the identification of age patterns of variation or similarity should aid us in the distinguishing of period and cohort effects.

Method

Data used in the present analysis were collected in 1981 from the two Western Canadian cities of Edmonton, Alberta and Winnipeg, Manitoba. In that year the Edmonton Area Study and the Winnipeg Area Study employed a common sampling design, questionnaire, and data collection and coding techniques. The interviews were conducted during the same time period, February through March, 1981. Trained interviewers administered the survey instrument within the household setting.

The primary sampling unit was the household, and within the household a selection process resulted in one respondent. A simple random sample of all addresses listed in the 1980 assessment file for the City of Winnipeg and a simple random sample of all addresses compiled by the City of Edmonton from their 1980 enumeration were selected. In Winnipeg, 457 addresses were selected and a response rate of 74% resulted in 336 completed interviews. In Edmonton, 543 addresses were selected, and a

response rate of 75% resulted in a final sample of 400. The combined data set of 736 cases was used for this analysis.[9]

The quality of life questions employed were those that have been used in the annual Edmonton Area Study since 1977. (See Kennedy et al., 1977). These questions were taken from the 1974 Michigan Quality of Life Survey and the National Opinion Research Council Surveys. The question on overall life satisfaction was similar to a general question used by Campbell, et al. (1976:33).

The domains used in the present study were non-working activities; family life; health and physical condition; amount of time; friendships; and standard of living. Respondents were asked to answer the following set of questions on a scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 7 (very satisfied). "Now, for each area of life I am going to name, tell me the number that shows how much satisfaction you get from that area.

- Your non-working activities - hobbies and so on,
- your family life,
- your health and physcial condition,
- the amount of time you have for doing things you want to do,
- your friendships,
- your standard of living - the things you have - housing, car, furniture, recreation and the like."

Overall life satisfaction was assessed on the same 7-point scale using the question, "All in all how satisfied with life are you these days?"[10]

The validity and reliabilty of various overall and domain satisfaction measures have been discussed in the literature. Andrews and Withey (1976:197) evaluate the construct validity of the seven-point satisfaction

scale at .79 and .73 in two versions of their measurement model and find it one of the "useful alternative meth[illegible] for assessing perceptions of life quality" (p. 178). Kennedy and Lalu (1981) find evidence for the validity and reliability of various domain satisfaction measures, including those we have used, in their analysis of data collected over time. Campbell, Converse and Rodgers' analysis (1976:65-66) suggests that reliability is high on measures of domain satisfactions, but not as high on the single-item index of global well-being (p. 48). Herzog et al. (1982:90), noting the stable patterning of sociodemographic predictors across age groups, suggests that this "underscores the robustness of the concept of global subjective well-being for age comparisons". Atkinson (1982), using Canadian panel data, has also assessed the reliability and validity of general quality of life and domain satisfaction measures as well as indexes of general quality of life and domain satisfactions. He states (p. 128):

> These results provide considerable assurance that subjective measures possess the two attributes required of good social indicators - stability in unchanging situations and sensitivity to changing circumstances. While the endorsement does not apply to all subjective measures, this analysis demonstrates the validity of satisfaction measures for general quality of life and more specific domain evaluations.

Our categorization of age distinguishes four groups: young adulthood: under 35; early middle age: 35-44; late middle age: 45-64; and older adulthood: 65 and over. We employ the presence of children, but not their ages, due to an insufficient number of cases for each age breakdown. The

presence of a child in the household was a son or daughter of the respondent.[11]

Mean scores and standard deviations on overall life satisfaction are reported by age group and by age and presence of children. Analysis of variance was used to ascertain whether or not there are statistically significant differences among groups in overall life satisfaction (Tables 1 and 2). The SPSS ANOVA program has the advantage of being able to accommodate unequal cell sizes. Only if the overall Anova F test showed statistical significance at the .05 level, did we examine pairs of group means. Conservative measures for difference in pairs of group means were then employed (namely, the modified least squares difference procedure and the Scheffe procedure) (Nie, et al., 1975:427-428).

A stepwise multiple regression of overall life satisfaction on domain satisfactions was performed for age and age and presence of children categories (Tables 3 and 4). The forward (stepwise) inclusion technique establishes a statistically determined order among predictor variables (Nie, et al., 1975:334-340). Thus, the independent variable accounting for the most variance in the dependent variable appears first, and succeeding variables appear on the basis of the greatest amount of variance explained, taking into account the variance explained by variables already in the equation. The procedure allows one to determine the best set of predictor variables and establishes an order among these variables. The order of entry is used as an indicator of salience in the present research and allows comparison with recently published work by Medley (1980) on contributors to life satisfaction. Within the present data set, we may compare age and age and presence of children categories as to the order of entry of the independent variables. F ratios were calculated to evaluate

the incremental increase in R^2 achieved by the addition of variables at each step. An overall F test of the complete regression equation is presented, as well as standardized regression coefficients for all variables entering into the final equation. Only cases containing complete data on all variables were included in the analysis. For the age and presence of children analysis, the middle aged categories (35-44 and 45-64) have been collapsed because of the small N in the 35-44, no child category (27 cases).[12]

Findings

Table 1 shows no difference in reported mean overall life satisfaction between young and early middle-aged adults, a slight increase for the late middle-aged, and the highest score for the older adult group. However, the analysis of variance of life satisfaction by age groups (4 levels) with signficance level set at .05 does not allow us to reject the null hypothesis (Table 2). That is, age group does not have a statistically significant effect on overall life satisfaction. However, when a T test for the difference between the mean of the combined groups 1, 2, and 3 (18-34, 35-44, and 45-64) and group 4 (65 and over) was examined, this difference was found to be significant at the .05 level.

Examination of mean overall life satisfaction by age and presence of children again indicates the age differential noted above (Table 1). Those 65 years of age and over with no child present had the highest mean score. As might be expected, there were too few respondents 65 and over with child present for analysis. Among the young and middle-aged, those with child present had the highest mean scores, although the substantive differences in scores is not great. A two-way analysis of variance using the regression approach indicated that neither the main effects of age or

Table 1

Mean Overall Life Satisfaction by Age Group
and by Age and Presence of Child

Age Group	Mean	Standard Deviation
Young Adult (18-34) (321)	5.57	1.23
Early Middle-Aged (35-44) (132)	5.57	1.17
Late Middle-Aged (45-64) (181)	5.61	1.41
Older Adult (65 and over) (96)	5.93	1.28
Total (730)	5.63	1.28

Age and Presence of Child	Mean	Standard Deviation
Young Adult (18-34), no child present (197)	5.49	1.21
Young Adult (18-34), child present (126)	5.67	1.29
Middle-Aged (35-64), no child present (113)	5.42	1.38
Middle-Aged (35-64), child present (199)	5.69	1.27
Older Adult (65 and over), no child present (87)	5.92	1.33
Total (722)	5.62	1.29

Table 2

Overall Life Satisfaction by Age Group *
Analysis of Variance

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob.
Main Effects:					
Age Group	10.1	3	3.4	2.1	.10
Residual	1182.5	726	1.6		
TOTAL:	1192.6	729			

* Four age groups: 18-34, 35-44, 45-64, 65 and over

presence of child was statistically significant, nor was the interaction effect significant (Table 3).

Examining the relationship between the domains and overall life satisfaction by age group (Table 4), a number of general observations may be made.[13] The domains used appear to be most appropriate for the older age groups. The multiple R^2 for the late middle-aged and older adults indicates a total of 52% and 49% of the variance explained respectively, compared to 36% for young adults and 33% for the early middle-aged. The three most important domains accounting for overall life satisfaction are standard of living, family, and friendship satisfaction. The amount of variance explained by these three variables is 34% among young adults, 32% among the early middle-aged, and 45% among older adults. Standard of living and family life satisfaction explain 45% of the variance among the late middle-aged. This demonstrates the salience of both material well-being and interpersonal relationships to a sense of overall well-being for all age groups.

While it is not our intent at this time to examine the relationship between the actual quality and quantity of family and friend interaction and subjective satisfaction with family life and friendships, nor to examine the relationship between objective standard of living and subjective satisfaction with standard of living, we do point out that these dimensions of life are subjectively important. The importance of family life satisfaction demonstrated here lends indirect support to the interactionist perspective which stresses the importance of primary relationships in human life. At the same time, the salience of standard of living reflects a concern with material realities in themselves. Our findings in this regard are generally consistent with Medley's analysis in

Table 3

Overall Life Satisfaction by Age and Presence of Child *
Analysis of Variance

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob.
Main Effects:	4.9	3	1.6	1.0	.39
Age Group	4.8	2	2.4	1.5	.23
Presence of Child	1.7	1	1.7	1.1	.30
2-Way Interactions	.5	2	.2	.1	.86
Explained	17.1	5	3.4	2.1	.06
Residual	1175.1	723	1.6		
TOTAL	1192.2	728	1.6		

* Five groups: 18-34, no child present; 18-34, child present; 35-64, no child present; 35-64, child present; 65 and over, no child present.

Table 4

Subjective Determinants of Life Satisfaction
for Age Groups: Multiple Regression Analysis

Domains	Multiple R	R^2	R^2 Change	Betas
Young Adult (18-34)				
Standard of living	.41	.17	.167[c]	.267
Family life	.52	.27	.102[c]	.258
Friendship	.58	.34	.070[c]	.235
Health - physical	.60	.36	.019[b]	.136
Non-working activities	.60	.36	.004	.059
Amount of time	.60	.36	.002	.048
N = 314 R = .60 R^2 = .36 d.f. = 6/307 F = 29.24 p < .001				
Early Middle-Aged (35-44)				
Family life	.46	.21	.215[c]	.291
Friendship	.55	.30	.089[c]	.290
Standard of living	.57	.32	.019	.125
Health - physical	.57	.33	.004	.070
Non-working activities	.57	.33	.003	.055
N = 127 R = .57 R^2 = .33 d.f. = 5/121 F = 11.93 p < .001				
Late Middle-Aged (45-64)				
Standard of living	.53	.28	.284[c]	.377
Family life	.67	.45	.165[c]	.323
Health - physical	.72	.52	.070[c]	.279
Amount of time	.72	.52	.004	.068
Non-working activities	.72	.52	.003	.022
Friendship	.72	.52	.000	-.010
N = 172 R = .72 R^2 = .52 d.f. = 6/165 F = 30.30 p < .001				
Older Adult (65 and over)				
Friendship	.54	.29	.294[c]	.300
Standard of living	.63	.40	.108[c]	.227
Family life	.67	.45	.048[b]	.227
Health - physical	.69	.48	.027[a]	.154
Amount of time	.70	.48	.008	.086
Non-working activities	.70	.49	.001	.033
N = 87 R = .70 R^2 = .49 d.f. = 6/80 F = 12.58 p < .001				

[a] $p < .05$ [b] $p < .01$ [c] $p < .001$

regard to importance of standard of living and family life satisfaction (Medley, 1980:202-203). Medley did not include friendship satisfaction in his determinants.

Satisfaction with personal health and physical condition are third in order of additional variance explained among the late middle-aged and fourth among the young and the elderly. The relatively greater importance attached to health concerns by the late middle-aged group is also consistent with findings by Medley (1980) and by Bengtson, et al. (1977), suggesting that consciousness of mortality and fear of death assume importance at this age stage.

Our analysis using the variables age and presence of child in the household adds some considerable refinement to age group analysis. Among the middle-aged, the domains used appear to be most appropriate for those without children present in the household (53% of the variance explained). More detailed breakdowns indicate this to be the case for both early and late middle-aged categories, although as the numbers become smaller we must treat these findings more cautiously. Among older adults, where the percent of variance explained (49%) is also relatively high (see Table 4), R^2 is increased to .54 when we examine only those with no children present in the household. Among young adults, on the other hand, the domains appear to be more relevant to those with children present in the household.

While the general conclusions concerning the importance of standard of living, family life, friendship, and health/physical satisfaction in the explanation of overall life satisfaction continue to hold, we may observe the order changing depending upon presence or absence of children in the household (Table 5). When children are present, family life satisfaction assumes priority in the prediction of overall life satisfaction among age

Table 5

Subjective Determinants of Life Satisfaction for Age Groups and Presence of Children: Multiple Regression Analysis

Domains	Multiple R	R^2	R^2 Change	Betas
Young Adult (18-34), No Child Present				
Standard of living	.40	.16	.163[c]	.258
Friendship	.50	.25	.091[c]	.226
Family life	.54	.30	.042[c]	.175
Health - physical	.56	.32	.020[a]	.143
Non-working activities	.57	.32	.004	.066
Amount of time	.57	.32	.001	.041
N = 193 R = .57 R^2 = .32 d.f. = 6/186 F = 14.68 p < .001				
Young Adult (18-34), Child Present				
Family life	.44	.19	.194[c]	.361
Standard of living	.58	.33	.138[c]	.278
Friendship	.62	.39	.054[b]	.225
Health - physical	.65	.42	.033[a]	.166
Amount of time	.66	.43	.011	.108
Non-working activities	.66	.43	.000	.011
N = 123 R = .66 R^2 = .43 d.f. = 6/116 F = 14.66 p < .001				
Middle-Aged (35-64), No Child Present				
Standard of living	.56	.32	.316[c]	.339
Family life	.68	.46	.140[c]	.279
Health - physical	.71	.50	.047[b]	.231
Friendship	.72	.52	.020[a]	.134
Amount of time	.73	.53	.005	.076
Non-working activities	.73	.53	.001	.037
N = 107 R = .73 R^2 = .53 d.f. = 6/100 F = 18.75 p < .001				
Middle-Aged (35-64), Child Present				
Family life	.45	.21	.205[c]	.306
Standard of living	.54	.29	.086[c]	.230
Health - physical	.58	.33	.044[c]	.198
Friendship	.59	.35	.011	.119
Amount of time	.59	.35	.000	.019
N = 191 R = .59 R^2 = .35 d.f. = 5/185 F = 19.63 p < .001				
Older Adult (65 and over), No Child Present				
Standard of living	.56	.31	.314[c]	.300
Family life	.68	.47	.154[c]	.295
Friendship	.72	.51	.044[a]	.239
Health - physical	.73	.53	.016	.114
Amount of time	.73	.54	.011	.110
N = 78 R = .73 R^2 = .54 d.f. = 5/72 F = 16.78 p < .001				

[a] $p < .05$ [b] $p < .01$ [c] $p < .001$

groups affected. This is in line with our expectations concerning the impact of both contemporary and historical social conditions on the meaning attached to children in households and "appropriate" attitudes toward them. From the point of view of the material reviewed here, it is not surprising that for all age groups represented in this sample family life satisfaction should assume priority in the structure of overall life satisfaction when children are present in the household. It must again be noted that there were insufficient cases for analysis among older adults with a child present. Rosow (1973:82) notes the disappearance of major familial roles among the elderly, a fact which makes the examination of certain social structural effects across all age groups impossible. However, the findings for older adults with no child present are consistent with other age groups with no child present. It is also interesting to note that among older adults, as among other age groups, family life satisfaction is a significant contributor to overall life satisfaction, regardless of the presence of children.

Discussion

Differences in overall life satisfaction by age and by age and presence of children are not great; neither are they statistically significant. However, the subjective structure of well-being (the relationship between domain satisfactions and overall life satisfaction) is affected by age and the presence of children. This suggests to us that comparable overall life satisfaction may be achieved in a variety of ways, and that the structuring of subjective domain satisfactions is a response to objective characteristics like age and presence of children in the household. Future research could well concentrate on other determinants of the subjective structure of life satisfaction and on achieving a more

comprehensive complement of subjective domain satisfactions, particularly for those under 45 and for the middle-aged with no children present in the household.

In the literature a great deal of stress has been put on age group differences, particularly in the field of applied aging, where there is an important and often neglected interest group to be serviced. From a more general and theoretical perspective, however, similarities of impact may highlight key contemporary structures within a given sociocultural context that are powerful enough to override the varying historical experiences of the generations. At the same time, we must realize that the past and present are multidimensional, and that the historical experience of living generations may not be essentially different in regard to the dimension we are tapping. Our examination of the effect of age and presence of children on the subjective structure of life satisfaction is a case in point. However, if the commentators on current social conditions leading to a new paradigm of childhood or to the "disappearance" or "loss" of childhood are correct, this same kind of analysis performed in the future might lead us to predict differences rather than similarities in the subjective structure of life satisfaction across age groups. Period and cohort effects would be more readily identifiable in such an analysis.

Of the formation of ideas, Mannheim (Prager Press, 28 March, 1937 in Wolff [1971:cv]) states: "Today it becomes ever clearer to us that man's thought is part of his coming to terms with his society and its conditions, that the formation of consciousness is the result of his social life, and that as society changes, so does man." In a framework which views attitudes as dependent variables, it is important to look to both historical and contemporary social conditions to derive age-related

expectations, and this exercise may be enhanced when we use age along with other independent variables which direct us to tap specific aspects of historical and contemporary social life.

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NOTES

1. Mannheim's general outline of the problem is still followed in contemporary discussions (see Riley, 1976 and Bengtson and Cutler, 1976).

2. The methodological correlate of this theoretical formulation is the separation out of period and cohort effects. In contemporary discussions, a third effect is often noted as well, that of aging per se. Thus Rodgers (1982:786) states, "Age, period, and cohort, for example, generally are not of much intrinsic interest to social scientists; they are used only because they are convenient and readily measurable indicators of more basic concepts, such as biological or intellectual development, economic conditions, or the effects of childhood environments. Our problems arise because these indicators are confounded; the underlying concepts are not confounded."

3. Postman links this erosion to the character of modern mass communication.

4. This argument does not address the choice of persons to remain childless, which is a different matter altogether. We are concerned with actual children in the household, not with the decision to introduce children into the household.

5. It must be noted that this may or may not constitute a positive experience for the child. Furthermore, when we speak of "appropriate" parental attitudes from a societal point of view, we are saying nothing about actual behaviours.

6. For a detailed description of the surveys used, see Herzog, et al. (1982).

7. Self-reported health status was the first.

8. Maas and Kuypers (1975) report longitudinal research on the adult life course, relating their findings to the developmental perspective. They examine both contextual and personality variables over time. Palmore and Kivett (1977) use longitudinal data to examine changes in life satisfaction of respondents 46 through 70 years of age.

9. For a more detailed description of the Winnipeg Area Study and Edmonton Area Study methodology and general descriptions and comparisons of demographic and other selected characteristics of the respective populations, see Currie and Thacker (1982) and Kinzel (1981).

10. Andrews and McKennell (1980) assess the impact of method factors, including identical response scale, on the interrelationships of satisfaction measures.

11. It should be noted that more than one son or daughter may have been present in the household, and that the ages of sons or daughters varied by ages of the respondents, as one might expect. Among the middle-aged, 28.7% of all sons or daughters present in all of the households were 18 or over; whereas less than .5% of the children in young adult households were 18 or over. The presence of young adult "children" in the middle-aged households does not cause us to modify our expectations concerning the subjective structure of life satisfaction of respondents, since the very fact of living at home may

extend the feelings of concern or responsibility of parents for children beyond any legally defined age limit.

12. It should be noted that it is in the late middle-aged category (45-64) that health becomes a concern. Detailed breakdowns for both age and marital status and age and presence of children indicate this. The effect appears to be due to age.

13. The independent variables present some problems of multicollinearity as is indicated by the comparison of the multiple correlation with the correlation associated with the first independent variable entering the solution. Inspection of correlation matrices for each of the subsamples revealed that there was no correlation higher than .45.

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